

Wednesday, 25 February 2009, 15:14
C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ISLAMABAD 000415
SIPDIS

EO 12958 DECL: 02/25/2019
TAGS PGOV, PREL, PINR, KJUS, E Aid, PK
SUBJECT: SHARIF DISQUALIFIED FROM OFFICE
REF: A. ISLAMABAD 378 B. ISLAMABAD 141 C. LAHORE 11 D. LAHORE 9 E. 2008 LAHORE 221
Classified by: Charge d'Affaires Gerald Feierstein for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

1. (C) Summary and Comment: Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled February 25 that both Nawaz and Shabbaz Sharif from the opposition Pakistan Muslim
2. (C) Even before the press conference, there were sporadic demonstrations in Punjab, particularly Lahore, and Islamabad/Rawalpindi; we expect
3. (C) The decision comes as no surprise as Zardari has been telling us for weeks that he was going to move against Nawaz. This was a controver
4. (C) The ruling will open up the battle for control of the Punjab Provincial Assembly and prompt renewed rounds of inter-party negotiations.

The Decision

15. (SBU) On February 25, a three-judge panel of Pakistan's Supreme Court effectively ruled that both opposition Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-
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decided to represent the Sharifs in an appeal to the Supreme Court.

16. (SBU) By dismissing the pro-Sharif appeals, those original, adverse rulings stand, Attorney General Latif Khosa told PolOff February 25. The
17. (C) There is continuing confusion over Shahbaz's case. The Lahore Elections Ruling Officer decided in December 2007 that Shahbaz was disqualified.
PPP Reaction

18. (C) The decision was no surprise; Zardari advised Ambassador weeks ago that he felt he had to move to rein in Nawaz (Ref). However, in a r
19. (C) Asked about any further legal steps, Zardari indicated the government might consider going back to the Lahore High Court to appeal the
10. (C) After the ruling, AG Khosa today noted to PolOff that the PML-N could always negotiate with the PPP to amend the qualification/disqual
11. (C) Ispahani confided that Zardari would take further actions to ensure the March 12-16 lawyers' march/sit-in "would not cause problems."
PPP Moves in on the Punjab
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12.(C) Despite Gilani's assurance to Shahbaz earlier in the week, Zardari is already moving in on the Punjab government. In addition to temporary Opposition Reaction

113. (C) Principal Officer Lahore met February 25 with Shahbaz and Nawaz Sharif (septel) to hear their reaction. The Sharifs pre-briefed what N
114. (C) Shahbaz told the PO that this was now "war" with the PPP, and the PML-N would take their battle directly to the streets. The Sharifs w
115. (C) In Nawaz's press conference, he carefully tried to create friction against Zardari on several levels. He said the PML-N did not blame
116. (C) PML-N Spokespersons Ahsan Iqbal and Siddiq-ul-Farooq declared, "We do not recognize this court." Iqbal went even further, charging Zar
Public Reaction

17. (C) The public's reaction was swift. Sporadic demonstrations began in Lahore, and other cities throughout Punjab saw large crowds. In Lahore, ISLAMABAD 00000415 004 OF 004
called for strikes. and we expect additional demonstrations in the coming days.
U.S. Reaction

118. (C) Zardari asked Charge for a readout of PO Lahore's meeting with Nawaz; Charge said that the PO had conveyed the U.S. position that this
119. (C) Comment: The decision comes as no surprise; Zardari has been telling us for weeks that it was coming and that he felt he could control
120. (C) The game now will be controlling the street, and Zardari has about two weeks if he is to make any repairs to reduce the impact of the
121. (C) Zardari may indeed win the short-term tactical battle against Nawaz. In the longer term, however, Nawaz is playing his cards well and
FEIERSTEIN